

**Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting  
March 19, 2019 Minutes**

**Attendance:** Linda Lewis, Leonard Yourman, Ben Allnutt, Lori Larson, Doug Lechliden, Patrick Jamison, Chuck Schuster, Jane Evans, Peter Driscoll, Steve Robertson, Eleanor Leak, Aliza Silver

**Staff:** Jeremy Criss

**Agenda items are in bold and minutes are not bolded.**

1. **Call the Meeting to Order and Introductions.** 7:16 pm
2. **Approval of the AAC meeting minutes from February 19, 2019.** Accepted as amended, with technical changes. (Larson/Driscoll)
3. **The House Bill 20 and Senate Bill 344 both have passed their chambers and it looks like we will have a way of collecting portions of State Agricultural Transfer Taxes. Moving forward developers will no longer be exempt from paying the State Agricultural Transfer Tax and they will have to pay a minimum of 35% of the State Agricultural Transfers. (First year-100% Second year-50% and Third year and beyond-35%.)**

This compromise sliding scale was worked out in conjunction with the realtors' association. Once signed into law by the Governor, the challenge will be tracking it at the county level.

4. **There are several projects in the development phase for Farm Alcohol Production Facilities in both Up and Down County areas. I am also hearing how some farmers are agreeing to contract growing of specialty crops for the owners of these facilities. The Office of Agriculture believes contract growing of specialty crops will expand moving forward representing opportunities for farmers**

If you want to participate in Farm Alcohol Production, once you get a license from the state and the property is ag assessed, you must prepare your plan for ag production and keep a log of activities. If you decide to construct a building for tasting for fewer than 49 people, then you don't need to get a building permit. Otherwise, there is no permit required; all you have to do is send the county a copy of your plans. Special Assistant to the CE, Dale Tibbitts, said the CE is concerned how Farm Alcohol Production will be implemented and he wants to have checks and balances in the process. They want OAG to develop Executive Regulations so that the OAG becomes the gatekeeper on all future farm alcohol production facilities.

5. **We are still waiting for the next Agritourism Study Advisory Committee-ASAC follow up meeting. Bob Cissel is meeting with the Chairman of the Planning Board on Monday and Bob has this issue on his list of questions for Casey Anderson.**

Casey said he knows the staff is working on the ASAC, but he was not familiar with the details of what Josh Penn was working on as part of seven ASAC meetings he had with the committee.

- 6. The Sugarland Broadband Pilot construction along Partnership Road is completed and service hook ups are underway. Comcast is waiving the installation costs to the residents including the long runs up their driveways for hooking up the service. Comcast is now working to schedule construction along the Sugarland Road. We have only one remaining property owner that still needs to sign the Comcast easement. The County has applied to the USDA for grant funding to expand broadband into the Agricultural Reserve. Several Ag Reserve residents have expressed interest to assist in replicating the success of the Sugarland Pilot into other areas of the Agricultural Reserve. There will be a ribbon cutting ceremony once the winter weather passes. <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/cable/Sugarland/sugarland-comcast.html>**

There is only one more holdout along Sugarland Road who won't sign the Comcast easement. It is unimproved land and an absentee landlord (owned by a nonprofit organization). The county government didn't have the correct address to send the property taxes to, so they haven't paid property taxes for a few years. The owner asked the county to forgive the back taxes, which they won't do. Margie Williams, the cable franchise manager, and Cathy Matthews have been communicating with the leaders of the nonprofit group.

Comcast is still making progress with the drop-down lines (bringing power down the pole from the transformer down to power the system). They are completing phase I and are scheduling the construction for coming down Sugarland Road. Comcast is committed to completing the project, after committing over \$500,000.

Mitsi Herrera has ideas about how to expand broadband if we can get USDA grants. The biggest concentration is looking at Dickerson and going east towards Boyds. Everywhere there is a traffic light, there is fiber because every traffic light in the county is wired to the DOT mainframe computer.

- 7. Bob Cissel, Director of MAP arranged for meetings with each member of the Montgomery County Council on February 6, 2019. Bob extended invitations to other agricultural groups including MCFB-Michele Cropp, MC Agricultural Center-Carl Hobbs, and the Office of Agriculture-Jeremy Criss. Council members Will Jawando, Tom Hucker and Nancy Navarro were not able to attend, and a follow up meeting is scheduled for March 21, 2019.**

This week they will be meeting with Will Jawando and others. The meetings have been helpful, especially with the new members of the Council. They are interested in tours of the ag reserve.

- 8. Update on the FY19 1.5% Savings Plan for the OAG totals \$14,583. The Savings Plan will delay the date of payments of matching grants the OAG will be able to provide through June 30, 2019 in addition to reducing our marketing outreach for farmers markets and the farm tour. Update on the FY20 Budget Reduction for the OAG totals \$34,000. The County Executive has accepted the OAG recommendation to reduce the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation-MAEF and Montgomery County Public Schools-MCPS by \$34,000. This reduction will reduce the number of schools the Mobile Science Lab-Food Fiber and you can visit each year from 27 schools down to 13 schools. The PHED Committee Work Session is**

**May 1, 2019. The OAG has reached out to the Edward Byrd Family Foundation to see if they could backfill the reduced General Fund and restore the contract.**

As personnel costs have gone down, Jeremy has been able to use those savings as part of OAG's permanent reductions. OAG has been reduced by \$127,000 since FY17. Soon, OAG will have no operating money and only personnel costs. Jeremy was encouraged by conversations on the reductions with Council members during the February and March MAP meetings.

Jeremy reached out to the Edward Byrd Family Foundation because they contributed \$50,000 to MAEF and \$50,000 to Farm Bureau scholarships in December 2018.

- 9. Update on the MNCPPC letters to farmers announcing a pesticide prohibition for using Glyphosate-Round Up. Jeremy met with Mike Riley and John Nissel. They explained how Council member Tom Hucker, Chair of the Transportation and Environment Committee wants to prohibit the use of Glyphosate on all properties owned by the County Parks Department. Mike and John explained what the Parks Department is doing to manage weeds without pesticides on all the athletic fields they own and operate. Mike was not aware that staff sent the December 18, 2018 letters to the tenant farmers that lease park properties. Mike said he did not want to address the park properties that are leased to farmers because there are exemptions for pesticides used for agricultural production. Jeremy suggested that moving forward, the Parks need to partner with the agricultural groups the next time they meet with Council representatives to discuss pesticide prohibitions for all park properties and Mike and John agreed with this suggestion.**

Tom Hucker tweeted yesterday about glyphosate and County Parks. It appears that Hucker initiated the letters sent from P&P to farmers leasing park land in December. Hucker is now chair of the Transportation and Environment committee, as of December. There was never formal written confirmation that farmers can disregard the P&P letters that said farmers couldn't use glyphosate on leased land. Jeremy only got that confirmation verbally (twice). As an aside, the farms leased from P&P and which are farmed are not publicly accessible. Trail systems are separate from the lands that are leased for commodity agriculture.

- 10. The Maryland DNR conducted public meetings to promote their 15-year Deer Management Plan and revised Regulations. The DNR is recommending regulations that will negatively impact deer management in Montgomery County. Written comments to the MD-DNR from the County Executive, County Council and the Montgomery County Delegation were submitted by February 28, 2019.**

DNR ignored the last letter that AAC wrote in June. In our packets is a letter that Jeremy composed, and Nancy Navarro and Marc Elrich have signed onto. Ten years ago, the county had a deer hunting contest, with gift cards going to those hunters who donated the most deer; those deer were then processed and donated to people in need. In Maryland, the season ends on January 31. It would help to extend the season to February 28. Virginia's season goes into the first few weeks of April. In February, it's still cold enough outside that there aren't any ticks out yet.

- 11. On Tuesday March 12, 2019, the County Council held a continental breakfast for farmers to attend and then participate with a County Council Proclamation to celebrate National Agriculture Day. This was a well-attended event with over 30 farmers attending and several council members came to the breakfast to talk with farmers.**

It was a widely attended event. They got to mingle with councilmembers and their representatives. The proclamation was well done. Nancy Navarro, Craig Rice, and Andrew Friedson read it. OAG will send a nice letter of appreciation to the three members who cosponsored the Proclamation.

- 12. US Senator Ben Cardin is interested in conducting a round table discussion with County farmers for a date in April. Potential federal agricultural topics are H2A and H2B Seasonal workers, 2018 Federal Farm Bill-Industrial Hemp, and Federal funding for conservation assistance-Chesapeake Bay Restoration.**

Jeremy has explained that the later it gets into planting season the harder it will be for farmers to attend. Would like to discuss 5G/broadband and H2A and H2B visas for seasonal workers.

- 13. Update on the Appointments needed for the AAC. Jeremy is still working with Executive staff on the terms for the AAC members.**

- 14. Adjournment.** 8:35 pm. (Driscoll/Lewis)